

CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING
August 3, 2020

MINUTES

With quorum present, Director Ferguson called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m.

Present: Chad Peterson, Mary Scherling, Rick Steen, Glenn Ellingsberg, Ken Pawluk, Duane Breitling, Robert Wilson (all present via Teams Meeting)

Absent: Brian Hagen

Presenter: Pearl Ferguson, Human Services Zone Director;

I. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Scherling made a motion to approve the July 6, 2020 Board minutes. Mr. Steen seconded it. Motion carried.

II. Operations Report

Director Ferguson opened with a personnel report. Five new Economic Assistant Workers started today. This filled several openings and will give the seasoned workers a break in their caseloads since they have been covering for the vacancies. There are also additional positions, in various levels of recruiting which include a part-time Social Worker III in Case Management along with two other full-time positions in Case Management. Mr. Breitling asked how the hiring and retirement process compare to last year. Referring to the number of individuals leaving and the type of turnover in the department. Ms. Ferguson agreed she had the same question and has assessed some pockets of turnover in the organization, but this has not yet been compared historically. This information can be collected and evaluated to determine the level of voluntary, involuntary, or due to retirement. This has not been done yet but is on the list of things to do. There have been at least 4 retirements this year, many who had 20+ years of experience and collective knowledge will be missed.

When asked if there were any additional personnel questions, Mr. Breitling stated he understands a substantial percentage of staff will no longer be eligible for step increases. He asked if this had an impact or has there been any feedback? Ms. Ferguson reported the state did not approve annual raises for any Human Service Zone members across the state for 2020. So, those who would have normally received a raise did not this year. There are plans to give raises next year similar to the states pay increases in the past. The state works with a percentage increase, but it is not clear how that aligns with the step process. Further clarification will be needed from the state. Staff have asked about raises and information available has been openly shared. Another issue for staff is the higher starting wage in 2020. Because there were no pay increases from 2019 to 2020 the base pay range is higher for a new employee in 2020 than for an employee who was hired in 2019. So, there is a discrepancy in pay but the process to determine an employee's starting wage has been in alignment with how everything has been done in the past. There have been some frustrations reported but Ms. Ferguson has assured employees there has been no discretionary changes in payment.

Ms. Scherling asked if there are still employees working remotely, how it is working and how are scheduling appointments going? Ms. Ferguson reported things are going well. The adult services team of 4 is working from home but 80% of their work in in the field. The staff are

coming into the office when needed. The intake unit of 3 is working remotely but they rotate so there is an individual in the office to work with appointments which may come in. In family services there are approximately 35 workers telecommuting, so they come to the office when they need to do tangible tasks, appointments or court appearances and they have a rotating crew of individuals available for impromptu meetings. They schedule their own meetings remotely or on site. Economic assistance has about 35 staff working remotely using the same process as family services. A couple months ago Ms. Ferguson created a survey on telecommuting and 70 staff replies. It is going well. General comments on missing interaction and the minor challenges of going back and forth but there are also comments appreciating commuting delays. The productive and operation statistics demonstrate work is getting done. There needs to be a discussion on the long-term telecommuting ideas. The State is using this situation as a platform moving forward. This information was rolled out to Zone Directors. This only included state employees with no conversation if this would apply to Human Service staff.

Ms. Scherling noted the statistical report does not appear to show much change to economic assistance relative to the pandemic which she assumes is due to the additional economic assistance from the federal and state governments. Ms. Scherling noted the child protective cases are down. The concern is for missing cases and children falling through the cracks. Will there be more cases expected once school opens? Director Ferguson has monitored the numbers and noted they have not risen as expected. The speculation is the \$600 benefit has helped. With that benefit going away there is a concern the applications may increase. August will be a telling month. CPS cases did drop which the directors across the state have discussed. The children are spending less time with mandatory reporters because of closed programs. There is not a clear idea of what school will look like, but whatever ends up for the various school districts will determine what the numbers will look like in the future. If the children are not around mandatory reports what else can be done, has not yet been evaluated.

Mr. Pawluk asked if off site employees would address the need for the overcrowding issues in the building. Director Ferguson agreed it may help but would be hesitant to move people out permanently until there are policies in place. In terms of the state staff vacating the office we have had two leave thus far and until recently the state has asking to hold the space but if there staff do not return and home and community based staff were to work remotely then this would open up 10-12 offices on the 4th floor. HCBS hasn't got the go ahead yet. Mr. Pawluk asked for clarification on state vs county employees. Director Ferguson clarified there are Human Service Zone staff who report to the state and other Human Service Zone staff who report to the county. Staff who work for the state and report to the state but are housed locally in the in the Zone. This is true of some childcare staff and long-term care staff within economic assistance staff. The rest of the members who work in the Human Service Zone are Cass County employees who function under the state merit system and discipline but are still Cass County employees. Mr. Pawluk would like a flow chart. Director Ferguson clarified there are organizational charts. This includes the state employees.

No additional updates for Intake or APS, their numbers have been consistent. Those until now report to Director Ferguson so they are figuring out how to work together.

III. Administrative Updates

Updated human service zone plan was due on June 1st, 2020 and they are behind schedule. When it is returned the information will be shared with the board.

Director Ferguson will gather an update on the status of some of the redesign projects since they were halted for COVID but various state departments are getting their 2124 projects back up and running. This will give an understanding and idea of the additional responsibilities on the staff. For example, the state is rolling out the "Practice Model" which is a guidance for child welfare across the state this is aimed at providing guidance for continuity across the state.

The state is hiring a Director of Zone Operations. They have narrowed the candidates down and will be completing interviews over the next couple weeks. The zone directors will be reporting relationship within conjunction with the Human Service Board. The Directors have been informed one of the first initiatives is to develop and deliver zone board training.

Director Ferguson will attend other zone board meetings in August to see if there are any elements which should be added to this meeting's agenda which would add information and be beneficial.


Mr. Pawluk would like information on case load leveling described in the report. Director Ferguson addressed the two elements in economic assistance caseloads which have been historically high due to the large population. There have been discrepancies due to staff turnover which means staff carry larger caseloads. The case load leveling refers to when there is a staff vacancy. When there is a vacancy the zone it is required to reach out to the other zones to ask if they can take any additional cases. It is a collaborative level between the zones. The amount of cases taken by each zone is based on their capacity. The understanding is the states has a vision to implement a process management plan which would allow applications to process like an assembly line. This will allow employees to specialize in their part of the application. This should increase efficiencies and ease the employee's caseload. The meeting was to occur July 22, 2020 but the state pushed it back. Director Ferguson is interested to see what this looks like to benefit discrepancies such as the load of cases between a senior vs a junior employee. There is hesitation and concern customer service may go away when dealing with a portion application instead of the whole so this will have to be balanced.

Mr. Peterson reintroduced the idea of alternate hours for clients which was discussed in the past and he would like to know Director Ferguson's thoughts in regard to more flexible hours for clients. To be added to a future agenda.

IV. Adjournment

Mr. Pawluk made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:34 p.m. Mr. Peterson seconded. Motion carried.

Pearl Ferguson, Zone Director
Cass County Human Services Zone Board



Blair Hodge, Recorder